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ABSTRACT

Conflictual family issues appearing during adolescence have not been adequately dimensionalized. In addition to this problem, researchers have focused on age-related variations in family conflicts without investigating other characteristics. A study was conducted to describe organized domains of conflictual family issues and to describe variations in these domains by adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member. Sixty-three intact family triads (mother, father, and adolescent) completed the Issues Checklist and an instrument designed to assess pubertal status. Principal factor analysis with varimax rotation resulted in the retention of seven factors accounting for 78.52% of the variance. Separate stepwise regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member as predictors. General and Appearance Issues were found to be more disruptive in families with daughters than in those with sons. Room Care and School Issues varied by status as a family member. Leisure and Time Management Issues varied by adolescent pubertal status. Only Household Issues were unrelated to any of the predictor variables. In summary, the affective climate of the family can be characterized by a variety of conflictual domains, the intensity of which appears to be related to adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member. (Author/NB)

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Variations in Conflictual Family Issues by Adolescent Pubertal Status, Gender, and Family Member

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe domains of family conflict and to examine variations in these domains by adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member. Sixty-three intact family triads completed an instrument designed to assess pubertal status and the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). Principal Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in the retention of seven factors accounting for 78.52% of the variance. Separate Stepwise Regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member as predictors. General and Appearance Issues were more disruptive in families with daughters than sons. Room Care and School Issues varied by status as a family member. Leisure and Time Management Issues varied by adolescent pubertal status. Only Household Issues were unrelated to any of the predictor variables. In summary, the affective climate of the family can be characterized by a variety of conflictual domains, the intensity of which are related to adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member.

Introduction

Two major tasks face researchers interested in the systematic study of conflictual family issues during adolescence. First, reviews of previous research indicate that conflictual family issues have been inadequately dimensionalized (Montemayor, 1983, 1986; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). The general approach of previous studies has been to assess the prevalence of specific conflictual issues without examining whether these issues are interrelated. The end result is a literature that neglects organized domains of conflictual family issues (e.g. Leisure Issues) in favor of specific issues (e.g. using the television). This practice may obscure developmental trends in the types of issues that achieve significance in the family as well as changes in the intensity of those issues.

Second, researchers have focused on age-related variations in family conflict without investigating additional individual and family characteristics that may account for differences in the affective quality of the family climate during adolescence. Previous research (Papini & Sebby, 1987; Steinberg, 1981) reveals changes in the affective quality of family relations that are related to adolescent pubertal status, especially for mothers and adolescents. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe organized domains of conflictual family issues and to describe variations in these domains by adolescent pubertal

status, gender, and status as a family member.

Method

Subjects. The 63 intact family triads participating in this study were obtained from seventh grade students enrolled in a public school. Triads were comprised of the mother, father, and adolescent son or daughter. All of the adolescents were 13 years old, and families were homogeneous with respect to parental age, income, and educational level. Each family member completed a demographic questionnaire and an instrument designed to assess adolescent pubertal status (see Papini & Sebby, 1987 for criteria). In the 23 family triads with male adolescents, 5 were assessed as prepubertal, 12 as transpubertal, and 6 as postpubertal. In the 40 family triads with female adolescents, 6 were assessed as prepubertal, 13 as transpubertal, and 21 as postpubertal.

Instrument. Each family member also completed the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). The Issues checklist was selected for several reasons. First, the checklist is comprised of 44 issues that are likely sources of conflict in families with adolescents. The inclusion of that many issue allows for a greater dimensionalization of family conflict than has been attempted in previous studies. Second, the Issues Checklist is designed to reliably and validly assess the prevalence and intensity of parent-adolescent arguments related to each issue, thereby enhancing dimensionalization and the search

for variations in conflictual family issues during adolescence.

Results

A Principal Factor Analysis was performed using the intensity measure of each family member's response to the Issues Checklist. The purpose of this analysis was to identify and describe organized domains of conflictual family issues. Following Varimax rotation, seven factors accounting for 78.52% of the variability were retained using criteria reported by Dillon and Goldstein (1984). The factor names, factor loadings, and communality estimates are presented in Table 1.

Stepwise Regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member serving as predictors. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. The interpretation of these findings is facilitated by an examination of the means and standard deviations of the factor scores presented in Table 3. The results reveal that:

a. Families with adolescent daughters reported more intense conflict about General and Appearance Issues than did f·milies with sons.

b. Adolescents report more intense conflicts about School Issues, and mothers report more intense conflicts about Room Care Issues than did other family members.

c. Leisure and Time Management Issues were reported as most

intense by prepubertal and transpubertal families.

Conclusions

1. The domains of conflictual family issues identified and described in this study represents an improvement in the dimensionalization of family conflict by providing an empirical assessment of the interrelationships between conflictual family issues. Instead of examining specific issues that generate family conflict during adolescence, this study examines organized domains of conflictual family issues. This approach may provide a broader perspective from which to view adolescent development in a family context.

2. Results of the regression analysis indicate that some domains of family conflict may vary in relation to individual and family characteristics during adolescence. Conflictual intensity was related to adolescent pubertal status, gender, and status as a family member for all but one of the factors (Household Issues). Especially noteworthy are the findings related to adolescent pubertal status. Previous researchers have suggested that there is a link between adolescent pubertal status and affective family relations, characterized by increased family conflict during transpuberty (i.e. Steinberg, in press; Steinberg & Hill, 1978). The present study supports such a notion and points to domains of family issues (e.g. Leisure and Time Management Issues) in which affective family relations can be further explored. The results of this study also support earlier findings

concerning mother-adolescent confrontations, and identifies at least one domain (e.g. Room Care Issues) where tension occurs.

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Table 1

Factor Names, Factor Loadings, and Communality Estimates Following Principal Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation.

Factor Name	Factor Loadings	Communality
F1: General Issues		
Sex	.70	.60
Who your friends are	.53	.39
Drinking beer or other liquor	.49	.60
What time to have meals	.46	.39
Buying records, games, etc.	.43	.51
Coming home on time	.40	.47
Turning off lights in the house	.40	.53
F2: School Issues		
Getting in trouble at school	.77	.71
Lying	.66	.52
Getting low grades in school	.65	.55
Doing homework	.41	.41
F3: Household Issues		
Messing up the house	.56	.60
Helping out around the house	.56	.49
Playing the radio too loud	.53	.54
Making too much noise at home	.48	.52
Talking back to parents	.40	.49
F4: Room Care Issues		
Putting away clothes	.77	.68
Cleaning up bedroom	.72	.59
F5: Appearance Issues		
Selecting new clothing	.60	.48
Which clothes to wear	.54	.56
Taking care of things	.43	.46
How neat clothing looks	.40	.37
F6: Leisure Issues		
Using the television	.58	.43
What the teenager eats	.55	.47
How to spend free time	.40	.39
F7: Time Management Issues		
Getting up in the morning	.59	.47
Time for going to bed	.59	.54
Getting to school on time	.41	.43

Table 2

Beta Values, R-Square, F Statistic, and Associated Probability Values for Pubertal Status, Gender, and Family Member in a Stepwise Regression Analysis Conducted for Each Factor.

Factor	Beta Value	R-Square	F	Probability ≥ F
F1: General Issues				
Gender	.30	.03	4.95	.03
F2: School Issues				
Family Member	.17	.02	4.16	.05
F3: Household Issues				
Not Significant				
F4: Room Care Issues				
Family Member	-.23	.05	8.72	.01
F5: Appearance Issues				
Gender	.24	.02	3.50	.06
F6: Leisure Issues				
Pubertal Status	-.20	.03	5.82	.01
F7: Time Management Issues				
Pubertal Status	-.17	.04	4.13	.05

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Factor Scores for the Significant Predictor Variables.

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation
F1: General Issues		
Families with Sons	-.18	.63
Families with Daughters	.12	.99
F2: School Issues		
Mothers	-.06	.84
Fathers	-.17	.60
Adolescents	.19	1.07
F4: Room Care Issues		
Mothers	.24	.88
Fathers	-.03	.79
Adolescents	-.21	.87
F5: Appearance Issues		
Families with Sons	-.14	.68
Families with Daughters	.10	.91
F6: Leisure Issues		
Prepubertal Families	.34	1.19
Transpubertal Families	-.04	.77
Postpubertal Families	-.11	.62
F7: Time Management Issues		
Prepubertal Families	.15	.83
Transpubertal Families	.11	.91
Postpubertal Families	-.18	.68

Positive factor scores reflect more intense conflict within a particular domain of family issues than negative factor scores.